China denies renewed US cyberattack claims

The Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China's military on Tuesday denied renewed U.S. accusations that it sponsored cyberattacks and said the two sides should cooperate against the global threat of computer crime.

The accusations in the latest Pentagon report on the Chinese military are "irresponsible and harmful to the mutual trust between the sides," Senior Col. Wang Xinjun, a People's Liberation Army researcher, was quoted by the official Xinhua News Agency as saying.

"The Chinese government and armed forces have never sanctioned hacking activities," said Wang, who is based at the Academy of Military Sciences in Beijing, one of the PLA's main think tanks. The military frequently uses such academics as alternative spokesmen.

The annual Pentagon report released Monday included for the first time the accusation that at least some attacks on U.S. government and other computer systems appeared to be "attributable directly" to the Chinese government and military. It said China is using its cyber capabilities to collect intelligence against U.S. diplomatic, economic and defense programs, and is developing the skills needed to conduct cyberwarfare.

The new wording in the report continues an escalating effort by U.S. officials to call out the Chinese on the cyberattacks and to press for a more open dialogue with Beijing on the problem.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying reiterated that China opposes cyberattacks as well as "all groundless accusations and hyping" that could harm prospects for cooperation.

"We are willing to hold even-tempered and constructive dialogue with the U.S." about cybercrime, Hua said.

The issue was spotlighted in February with the issuing of a report by U.S.-based cybersecurity firm Mandiant that claimed to have traced several years of cyberattacks against 140 mostly American companies to a Chinese military unit in Shanghai. Mandiant executives say attacks originating in China have continued since then, with the exception of those from Shanghai-based Unit 61398 that had been highlighted in its earlier report.

China says it's impossible to tell the true origin of cyberattacks, and accuses hostile forces in the U.S. and elsewhere of blaming China out of prejudice or a desire to put Beijing on the defensive.

It has also called on the sides to join forces against cyber criminals, and officials earlier this year agreed to set up a joint working group on cybercrime.

"Both China and the U.S. are victims of cybercrimes and should work together to tackle the problems," Xinhua cited Wang as saying.

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